

Latest trend in illegal banking

By Harry Harris
Tribune staff writer

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Rivera, James Earl

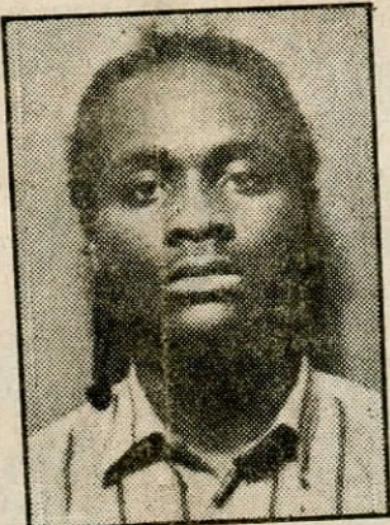
Two men who tried to yank an automatic teller machine from the wall of an East Oakland credit union early yesterday were instead hauled off to jail, investigators said.

The two suspects are believed to be the same men who bungled another attempt last July at the same credit union when the forklift they used to knock the ATM inside the building ran out of fuel, police said.

Like consumers, thieves around the country are finding the cash machines convenient. Stealing them whole has become the latest trend in illegal banking.

There has been a rash of thefts from the Northeast to the Midwest this year in which thieves make off with an entire ATM — and an average of \$10,000 to \$50,000 per machine.

According to the FBI, there were 85 ATM thefts in 1990 — an increase of 65



Police allege James Earl Rivera, 26, conceived the plot. Rivera, who claimed he was jogging in the area, was collared by a police dog.

percent over the year before.

Oakland Sgt. Jack Huth said yesterday that police learned Tuesday that an ATM somewhere on Hegenberger Road was going to be burglarized early yesterday.

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ATM heist

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Just after midnight a score of robbery investigators and Special Duty Unit officers began staking out two banks and the City and County Employees Credit Union of Alameda County.

About 4:20 a.m. police watching the credit union saw a large utility truck park in front of the ATM. The truck later turned out to have been stolen from a nearby roofing company.

The driver of the truck was picked up by another car. A few moments later, a Mustang convertible, that also turned out to have been stolen from a nearby motel, pulled up and parked near the truck, police said.

Huth said officers watched the two men inside the Mustang place paper bags over their heads that had holes punched out for their eyes and then approach the ATM with a large pry bar.

Huth said police later found a heavy chain in the back of the Mustang. They think the men were going to punch enough holes in the wall so they could secure the ATM with the chain and use the truck to pull it out of the wall.

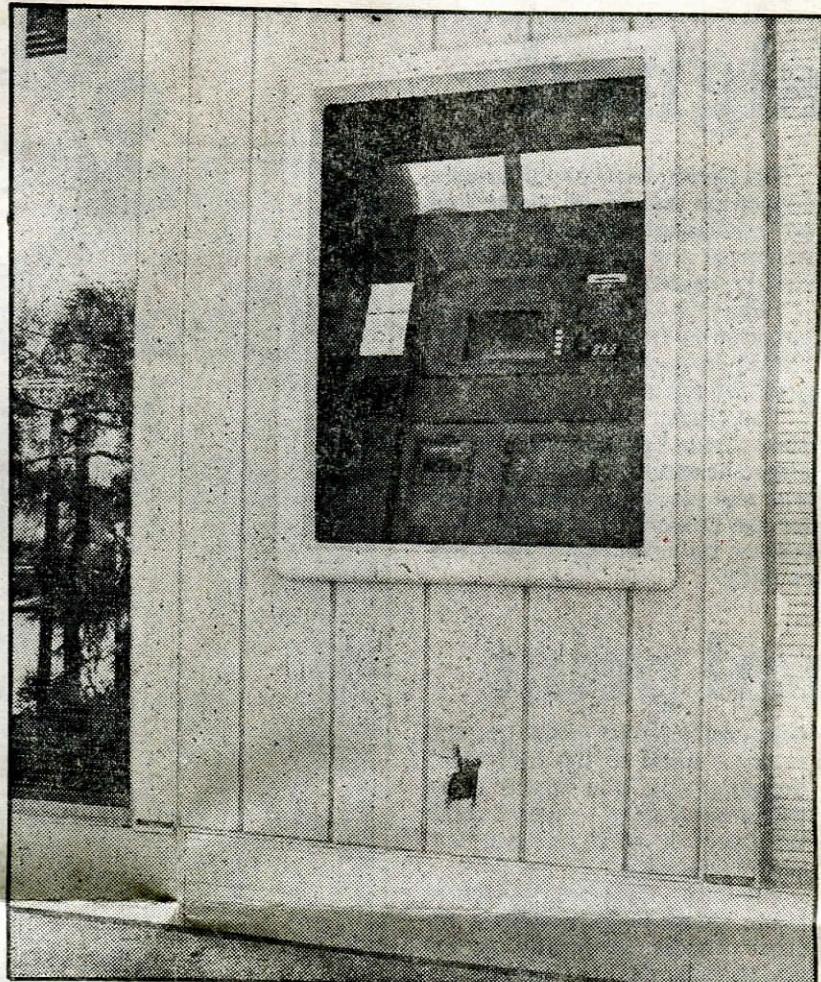
Huth said "it would have been a crude attempt but it's about the only way you can get an ATM out of a building."

Police said the ATM is about the size of a small safe. The machines usually weigh between 500 to 900 pounds.

Police watched the men attack the wall for several minutes before moving in. But the suspects jumped into the Mustang and tried to flee.

The car crashed into a parking lot fence behind the credit union and the men started running through nearby fields, shedding their clothes as they ran, Huth said.

One suspect, identified as Alfonso Robinson, 20, was cap-



By Gary Reyes/The Oakland Tribune

Thieves attempting to steal an ATM at an Eastbay credit union only succeeded in knocking a small hole in the wall.

tured about one-quarter mile away at a nearby post office.

The second, James Earl Rivera, 26, who police alleged was the mastermind of the plot, tried to hide in some high grass. He was arrested after a police dog was sent in to find him. He suffered bite wounds when he tried to fight the dog, Huth said.

Both men were only wearing shorts when they were arrested. Huth said Robinson claimed he had been drinking and using drugs and did not remember much else.

Rivera, who has served time in prison for burglary, told police he had been out jogging and had no idea why police chased him, Huth said.

Both men were booked for investigation of burglary and auto theft.

Huth said police believe the suspects are the same men who last July stole a forklift from a

storage yard and brought it to the credit union.

There, the forklift was rammed into the wall where the ATM was mounted until the impact knocked the machine "into the credit union about 15 or 20 feet."

But the forklift ran out of propane before it could be used to lift the ATM from the floor of the credit union and the suspects had to flee empty-handed, Huth said.

Thieves in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania had more luck with their equipment. Last week in Buffalo, Pa., and last month in Lowell, Mass., thieves used forklifts to make off with ATMs loaded with thousands of dollars.

In the last month alone, police in New Hampshire and Massachusetts have investigated eight thefts or attempted thefts of entire ATM machines.

— Tribune news services contributed to this report.

Oakland man, two others held in woman's death

SUN DEC - 4 1994 151
McCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE

STOCKTON — Three men have been arrested in connection with the murder of a Stockton woman who was shot and killed Friday when she walked into the middle of a foiled armored car robbery outside a Pacific Bell office, police said Saturday.

The three men were detained Friday afternoon and held for questioning until Saturday morning, when they were arrested on the charges and booked into San Joaquin County jail, said Stockton police Sgt. Billy Wykert.

Wykert identified the suspects as James Earl Rivera, 30, Oakland; Jerome Lee Moore, 24, Stockton; and Lionel Dixon, 40, no permanent address. All three were being held without bond.

Wykert said the men are charged with murder, conspiracy, attempted

robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, vehicle theft and possession of stolen property.

The suspects also were charged with burglary because they hid in the attic of the phone company office building until just before the attempted robbery, Wykert said.

The slaying of the woman and the attempted robbery of a Brinks guard occurred at 1:52 p.m. Friday in front of the Pacific Bell office in northwest Stockton. The office is at March Lane and Feather River Drive between Interstate 5 and Brookside Country Club.

According to the police, the guard

had picked up the morning receipts from the phone company's business office and was walking to an armored truck when he was confronted by three gunmen.

Wykert said it had not been determined how long the three men had been hiding in the attic of the office before they climbed down through a ceiling and into a bathroom. The suspects reportedly came out of the attic as the guard was leaving the office. They walked down a hallway and out the front door behind him. Once outside the three gunmen confronted the guard and demanded the money bag.

When the guard refused to hand it over, at least one of the three gunmen began shooting at the guard, Wykert said.

One of the shots struck Debra Elaine Nelson, 42, in the head as she walked into the middle of the gunfire while on her way into the office.

Nelson, the mother of four children, was apparently a customer who was on her way to do some business at the Pacific Bell office. She was 10 feet from the front door when she was shot, Wykert said. She died an hour later at San Joaquin General Hospital.

Search for jury starts in Stockton murder trial

WED SEP 27 1995

By Jessica Killorin

STAFF WRITER

ALAMEDA — Jury selection has begun in a Stockton murder trial shifted to Alameda Municipal Court earlier this month.

Because the case — involving the slaying of a bystander during a botched armored car robbery — had drawn excessive publicity in San Joaquin County, officials said unbiased jurors were difficult to find, and a change of venue was granted at the request of the defense.

Oakland residents Lionel Dixon, James Rivera and Jerome Moore stand accused of murdering 43-year-old Debra Nelson of Stockton during the 1994 shooting outside a botched armored car robbery at the Pacific Bell office in Stockton last December.

Testimony, scheduled to begin Oct. 17, will be given in department 2 of Alameda Municipal Court, a courtroom normally used for small claims cases. The small claims calendar will be moved to another courtroom in the building, officials said.

"It should have no real effect on the court except for a little more foot traffic," said Lori Kreeft, Alameda court administrator.

Any costs incurred will be billed to San Joaquin County, which is bringing in its own staff to handle the trial.

"We plan to send our own judge, clerk, bailiff and court reporter," said Annette Foreman, assistant court administrator for San Joaquin Superior Court.

The originally change of venue would have placed the trial in Alameda County Superior Court in Oakland. But because of space problems, that would have required at least seven courtroom changes throughout the trial, Foreman said.

In an unusual move, an available municipal court facility was chosen instead. The small-claims courtroom does not have a jury box and one had to be constructed for the trial.

The high-profile murder took place Dec. 2, 1994, outside a Pacific Bell office in Stockton where Debra Nelson went to pay her phone bill.

Nelson had stepped into the line of fire as the suspects, allegedly trying to grab \$30,000 bags of cash from an armored car, shot at a guard. She was struck once in the head.

Investigators believe that two more men were involved in the crime, but only Moore, Dixon and Rivera were caught.